

June 16, 1998

The Honorable John Dingell
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Dingell:

On behalf of the over 1,000,000 members of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, I am writing to support the Imported Food Safety Act of 1998 to improve the Food and Drug Administration's oversight of imported foods. Imported foods regulated by the FDA are subject to minimal inspection at the border. A recent report by the General Accounting Office documented that less than two percent of FDA-regulated imports are subject to border inspection, down from eight percent in 1992. This trend must be reversed.

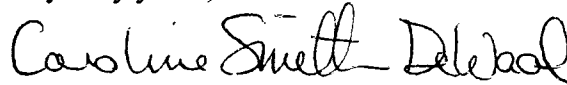
Your legislation makes many positive contributions to the debate on how to improve food safety. First, you recognize that border inspections must be improved to restore America's faith in the safety of imported foods. This is an important addition to President Clinton's initiative to give FDA inspectors enhanced ability to conduct inspections in foreign countries.

In addition, your legislation recognizes that FDA border inspectors lack essential tools to keep contaminated food off the market. Real-time tests to check for contaminated food would greatly enhance FDA's import-surveillance capabilities. In addition, those tests would be useful in monitoring our existing Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems for meat, poultry and seafood, and would allow for easier evaluation of new technologies to improve food safety. Focusing research on the development of real-time testing technologies is an important contribution to the discussion of how to improve food safety -- one that will have many future benefits.

I note that your bill also contains user fees for importers, an issue that has garnered long-term opposition by many industry and consumer organizations. A better approach would be to require both domestic and foreign food companies to register with the FDA and to allow the agency to charge a nominal registration fee. This would have the joint benefits of raising revenue and of giving FDA the name and address of every food processor and importer that the agency has an obligation to inspect.

Thank you for your leadership on food safety issues. We hope to work with you in the future on improving the regulation of imported foods.

Very truly yours,


Caroline Smith DeWaal
Director of Food Safety

